

It is but benestraw and greet forage.
And eek this olde wydwes, God it woot,
They konne so muchel craft on Wades boot,
So muchel broken harm, whan that hem leste,
That with hem sholde I nevere lyve in reste;
for sondry scoles maken sotile clerkis;
Womman of manye scoles half a clerk is.
But certeynly, a yong thyng may men gye,
Right as men may warm wex with handes plye.
Wherfore I sey yow pleyntly, in a clause,
I wol noon oold wyf han right for this cause.
for if so were, I hadde swich myschaunce
That I in hire ne koude han no plesaunce,
Thanne sholde I lede my lyf in avoutrye,
And go streight to the devel whan I dye.
Ne children sholde I none upon hire geten;
Yet were me levere houndes had me eten,
Than that myn heritage sholde falle
In straunge hand, and this I telle yow alle.
I dote nat; I woot the cause why
Men sholde wedde, and forthermoore woot I
Ther spekeþ many a man of mariage,
That woot namoore of it than woot my page,
for whiche causes man sholde take a wyf.
If he ne may nat lyven chaast his lyf,
Take hym a wyf with greet devocioun,
Bycause of lefelful procreacioun
Of children, to thonour of God above,
And nat oonly for paramour or love;
And for they sholde leccherye eschue,
And yelde hir dettes whan that they ben due;
Or for that ech of hem sholde helpen oother
In meschief, as a suster shal the brother,
And lyve in chastitee ful holily.
But sires, by youre leve, that am nat I,
for, God be thanked, I dar make avaunt,
I feele my lymes stark and suffisaunt
To do al that a man bilongeth to;
I woot myselven best what I may do.
Though I be hoor, I fare as dooth a tree
That blosmeth er that fruyt ywoxen bee;
And blosmy tre nys neither drye ne deed.
I feele me nowher hoor but on myn heed;
Myn herte and alle my lymes been as grene
As laurer thurgh the yeer is for to sene.
And syn that ye han herd al myn entente,
I prey yow to my wyl ye wole assente.

DIVERSE men diversely hym tolde
Of mariage manye ensamples olde.
Somme blamed it, somme preysed it,
certeyn;

But atte laste, shortly for to seyn,
As al day falleth altercacioun
Bitwixen freendes in disputioun,
Ther fil a stryf bitwixen his bretheren two,
Of whiche that oon was cleped Placebo,
Justinus soothly called was that oother.

PLACEBO seyde, O Januarie, brother,
ful litel nede hadde ye, my lord so deere;
Conseil to axe of any that is heere;
But that ye been so ful of sapience,
That yow ne liketh, for youre heighe prudence,
To weyven fro the word of Salomon.

This word seyde he unto us everychon:
Wilk alle thyng by conseil, thus seyde he,
And thanne shaltow nat repente thee.
But though that Salomon spak swich a word,
Myn owene deere brother and my lord,
So wysly God my soule brynge at reste,
I holde youre owene conseil is the beste,
for brother myn, of me taak this motyf,
I have now been a court man al my lyf,
And, God it woot, though I unworthy be,
I have stonden in ful greet degree
Abouten lordes of ful heigh estaat;
Yet hadde I nevere with noon of hem debaat;
I nevere hem contraried, trewely;
I woot wel that my lord kan moore than I.
What that he seith, I holde it ferme and stable;
I seye the same, or elles thyng semblable.
A ful greet fool is any conseilour,
That serveth any lord of heigh honour,
That dar presume, or elles thenken it,
That his conseil sholde passe his lordes wit.
Nay, lordes been no foolis, by my fay!
Ye han youreselven seyed heer today
So heigh sentence, so holily and weel,
That I consente and conferme everydeel
Your words alle, and youre opinioun.
By God, ther nys no man in al this toun,
Nyn al Ytaille, that koude bet han sayd,
Crist halt hym of this conseil wel apayd.
And trewely it is an heigh corage
Of any man that stapen is in age
To take a yong wyf; by my fader kyn,
Your herte hangeth on a joly pyn!
Dooth now in this matiere right as yow leste,
for, finally, I holde it for the beste.

JUSTINUS, that ay stille sat and herde,
Right in this wise to Placebo answerde:
Now, brother myn, be patient, I prey,
Syn ye han seyde, and herkneth what I seye.
Senek among his othere wordes wyse
Seith that a man oghte hym right wel avyse
To whom he yeveth his lond or his catel;
And syn I oghte avyse me right wel
To whom I yeve my good away fro me,
Wel muchel moore I oghte avysed be
To whom I yeve my body for alwey.
I warne yow wel, it is no childes play
To take a wyf withoute avysement.
Men mooste enquere, this is myn assent,
Wher she be wys, or sobre, or dronkelewe,
Or proud, or elles ootherweys a shrewe,
A chidester, or wastour of thy good,
Or riche, or poore, or elles mannyssh wood.
Albeit so that no man fynden shal
Noon in this world that trotteth hool in al,
Ne man ne beest, which as men koude devyse;
But nathelees, it oghte ynough suffice
With any wyf, if so were that she hadde
Mo goode thewes than hire vices badde.
And al this axeth leyser for tenquere;
for, God it woot, I have wept many a teere
ful pryvely, syn I have had a wyf.
Preyse whoso wole a wedded mannes lyf,

Certein, I fynde in it but cost and care,
And observances, of alle blisses bare.
And yet, God woot, my neighebores aboute,
And namely of wommen many a route,
Syn that I have the mooste stedefast wyf,
And eek the mekeste oon that bereth lyf;
But I woot best where wryngeth me my sho.
Ye mowe, for me, right as yow liketh do;
Avyseþ yow, ye been a man of age,
How that ye entren into mariage,
And namely with a yong wyf and a fair.
By hym that made water, erthe, and air,
The yongest man that is in al this route
Is bisy ynough to bryngen it aboute
To han his wyf allone, trusteth me.
Ye shul nat plesen hire fully yeres thre,
This is to seyn, to doon hire ful plesaunce.
I wyf axeth ful many an observaunce.
I prey yow that ye be nat yuele apayd.

EL, quod this Januarie, & hastow
sayd?
Straw for thy Senek, and for thy
proverbes!
I counte nat a panyer ful of herbes
Of scole/termes; wyser men than

thow,
As thou hast herd, assenteden right now
To my purpos; Placebo, what sey ye?
I seye, it is a cursed man, quod he,
That letteth matrimoine, sikerly.

And with that word they rysen sodeynly,
And been assented fully, that he sholde
Be wedded whanne hym list and wher he wolde.

EIGH fantasie and curious bisynesse
fro day to day gan in the soule impresse
Of Januarie aboute his mariage.
Many fair shap, and many a fair visage
Ther passeth thurgh his herte, nyght by nyght.
As whoso toke a mirour polished bryght,
And sette it in a commune market place,
Thanne sholde he se ful many a figure pace
By his mirour; and, in the same wyse
Gan Januarie inwith his thoght devyse
Of maydens, whiche that dwelten hym bisyde.
He wiste nat wher that he myghte abyde,
for if that oon have beaute in hir face,
Another stant so in the peples grace
for hire sadnesse, and hire benyngnytee,
That of the peple grettest voys bath she.
And somme were riche, and hadden badde name.
But nathelees, bitwixen earnest and game,
He atte laste apoynted hym on oon,
And leet alle othere from his herte goon,
And chees hire of his owene auctoritee;
for love is blynd al day, and may nat see.
And whan that he was in his bed ybroght,
He purtreied, in his herte and in his thoght,
Hir fresche beautee and hir age tendre,
Hir myddel smal, hire armes longe and sklendre,
Hir wise governaunce, hir gentillesse,
Hir wommanly berynge and hire sadnesse.
And whan that he on hire was condescended,
hym thoughte his choys myghtenat ben amended.

for whan that he hymself concluded hadde,
hym thoughte ech oother mannes wit so badde,
That impossible it were to replye
Agayn his choys; this was his fantasie.

HIS freendes sente he to, at his instaunce,
And preyed hem to doon hym that plesaunce,
That hastily they wolden to hym come;
He wolde abregge hir labour, alle and some;
Nedeth namoore for hym to go ne ryde,
He was apoynted ther he wolde abyde.

PLACEBO cam, & eek his freendes soone,
And alderfirst he bad hem alle a boone,
That noon of hem none argumentes make
Agayn the purpos which that he hath take;
Which purpos was plesant to God, seyde he,
And verray ground of his prosperitee.

Seyde, ther was a mayden in the toun,
Which that of beautee hadde greet renoun,
Al were it so she were of smal degree;
Suffiseth hym hir yowthe and hir beautee.

Which mayde, he seyde, he wolde han to his wyf,
To lede in ese and hoolynesse his lyf.
And thanked God that he myghte han hire al,
That no wight of his blisse parten shal;
And preyde hem to labouren in this nede,
And shapen that he faille nat to spede;
for thanne, he seyde, his spirit was at ese.
Thanne is, quod he, nothyng may me displese,
Save o thyng priketh in my conscience,
The which I wol rehere in youre presence.

HAVE, quod he, herd seyde, ful yooore ago,
Ther may no man han parfite blisses two,
This is to seye, in erthe and eek in hevene.
for though he kepe hym fro the synnes sevenene,
And eek from every branche of thilke tree,
Yet is ther so parfite felicitye,
And so greet ese and lust in mariage,
That evere I am agast now in myn age,
That I shal lede now so myrie a lyf,
So delicat, withouten wo and stryf,

That I shal have myn hevene in erthe heere.
for sith that verray hevene is boght so deere
With tribulacioun and greet penaunce,
How sholde I thanne, that lyve in swich plesaunce,
As alle wedded men doon with hire wyvys,
Come to the blisse ther Crist eterne on lyve ys?
This is my drede, and ye, my bretheren tweye,
Assoilleth me this questiou, I prey.

JUSTINUS, which that hated his folye,
Answerde anon, right in his japerie;
And for he wolde his longe tale abregge,
He wolde noon auctoritee allegge,
But seyde, Sire, so ther be noon obstacle
Oother than this, God of his hygh myracle,
And of his mercy, may so for yow wirche,
That, er ye have youre right of hooly chirche,
Ye may repente of wedded mannes lyf,
In which ye seyn ther is no wo ne stryf.
And elles, God forbode but he sente
A wedded man hym grace to repente
Wel ofte rather than a sengle man.
And therfore, sire, the beste reed I kan,
Dispeire yow noght, but have in youre memorie,